

## Hawkins County by Kamiye Celeek

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**Summary:** Mike expected to be working on a farm for the summer and being bored out of his mind. He didn't expect to get wrapped up in political corruption, illegal gambling, or in an illicit relationship with the daughter of the Chief of Police.

## 1. The Arrival

It was all Troy Harrington's fault, to be honest.

That was what Mike kept telling himself on the bus as he clutched his backpack and listened to the hum of the engine. Will was doodling in his sketchbook and glanced up at Mike every now and then. He and his best friend were currently the only people on said bus because it wasn't a school bus, like most people would assume two sixteen-year-old boys would be traveling on. No, this was the bus to Hawkins, Indiana—a small farming town a few hours away from where the boys lived in Chicago. The town where, because of the trouble the two of them had gotten into, they were being shipped out for the summer to stay with an old friend of Karen Wheeler and Joyce Byers. An old friend who was *also* the Hawkins Chief of Police and it was hoped that staying with him would keep the boys on the straight and narrow for the summer.

*Great. I might as well be in juvenile detention for the summer. Thanks, Mom.*

He didn't really blame her, though; she'd been having a rough time since the divorce and him getting into trouble like he had didn't help things. The Wheeler family was struggling (him, his mom, and Holly; Nancy was in New York for college) and Ted's checks sometimes helped, but that was when he remembered to send them. He definitely sent more than Lonnie Byers, that was for sure. Which was to say he sent *any* at all. Those checks were enough to cover groceries and rent but not much else, which was the other reason Mike was annoyed at everything that had happened. He'd finally managed to get a job, only for the trouble to come and him to lose it because 'I don't hire juvenile delinquents, Michael.'

The bus pulled to a stop at a bench in the middle of nowhere and Mike shook Will's shoulder.

"We're here."

"Okay..."

The two boys disembarked and grabbed their suitcases from under the bus before watching it pull away. Unfortunately, nobody was waiting for them at the bus stop... a fact that became painfully obvious once the bus left. Mike groaned and sat down on the bench.

"This summer's off to a great start," he grumbled.

"Maybe he's just running late," Will suggested, sitting down next to him.

As if to answer Will's suggestion, a Blazer came down the road and stopped in front of them. A man wearing a tan uniform and a hat got out and glanced at the boys.

"You must be Mike and Will I'm looking after this summer," he stated, nodding. "Chief Jim Hopper. Get in the car and I'll take you to the farm."

Wordlessly, the boys obeyed. Mike ended up in the backseat when Will called shotgun and his long legs disliked being cooped up like they were back there. The car started to move as Hopper pulled a three-point turn and headed back the way he'd came.

"Your mothers told me all about what happened," he stated. "Gotta say, you kids look like a couple of nerds to me, but appearances can be deceiving."

"You're right; we *are* nerds," Mike sighed. "This whole thing is so freaking stupid."

"I agree. But you're here now and you're stuck for the summer, so the four of you might as well make the best of it."

From there, it was small, stilted conversation as Hopper drove. All that was visible out the window was fences and farmland—not exactly what four boys from the third-largest city in America were used to seeing. Will counted cows and Mike tapped his foot anxiously. Eventually, they pulled down another dirt road, this one a driveway leading to a white two-story farmhouse. A cat was snoozing on the porch, golden-yellow with orange eyes that opened judiciously as soon as the boys got out of the Blazer and headed for the house.

"Get inside," Hopper instructed, and the two boys obeyed.

The inside of the house was pretty nice, too; exactly what you'd expect a farmhouse to be. Pictures lined the wall and nice furniture sat in the living room, just waiting to be used.

"There's two empty rooms upstairs. Each one has a twin bed, so you figure that out between you. Ignore the one that's a pink nightmare; that's Ellie's room and I'd thank you to stay out of it, even if she invites you in."

*She's probably like, ten.*

"Thank you for letting us stay here, Mr. Hopper," Will said.

"Just Hopper's fine. Go get settled and feel free to explore the farm. I need to get back to town."

Mike headed upstairs and quickly found one of the rooms Hopper had mentioned. He would be staying in that one; Will would be in the other. The room Mike was in was right next to a door labeled 'El's Room—Keep Out Unless Invited' in bright pink letters. That was what solidified this girl as ten years old in Mike's mind as he headed downstairs and out the door to 'explore the farm', as Hopper had put it. The cat bounded across the yard towards the barn, tail held high as it ran. Suddenly, there was a crash in the barn and Mike found himself sprinting to investigate.

A shelf of feed had fallen over, and a girl with curly brown hair was dusting herself off with her back to Mike. She was almost a foot shorter than him, he noted, and about his age. Then she turned around and he felt his heart stop.

She was easily the prettiest girl he'd ever seen in his life. Curls framed a petite face with big brown eyes and a button nose, and a mouth that appeared to have a smile playing at its corners. She smiled at him and *bam!* That was it; he had a crush on this girl that he didn't even know the name of yet.

"You must be one of the Chicago boys," she stated plainly, sticking out her hand. "I'm El Hopper."

*And there's the catch.*

El wasn't a ten-year-old girl. She was a drop-dead gorgeous girl his own age who was untouchable because *hello, Police Chief father who's putting up with his ass for the summer.*

"Mike Wheeler." He accepted the handshake and felt an electricity running through him as he made contact with her hand. He chose to ignore it for now.

"What an introduction, huh?" She gestured to the feed shelves that had fallen.

"Yeah. Are you okay?"

"I'm fine. Thanks for asking." She crouched to grab the fallen shelves and Mike moved to help her on instinct. They managed to put it back up before grabbing the sacks and bins of feed to put them back on the shelves.

"If this is what we're doing this summer, I don't think I'll survive," Mike sighed.

"You'll get used to it." She shrugged and started to head out of the barn. "Come on. I have to make dinner and I could use a hand, if you don't mind."

"I don't mind helping."

They went back to the house, the cat following El like she was a mama duck and the cat was a duckling. It was adorable and Mike was happy to follow El the same way into the house, where Will was investigating the TV.

"Hi, I'm Will Byers," he greeted El, sticking out his hand to shake hers.

"El Hopper. Welcome to Hawkins."

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"So, here are the ground rules."

Hopper had come home in time to eat dinner with the three teenagers who now lived under his roof and was currently sitting at the head of the table. Mike and Will watched him nervously.

"You have to help El with all her chores, no questions asked. El, that doesn't mean off-loading your chores onto them; the three of you work *together*. If you have free time, stay out of trouble. You have to be back by midnight every night; no exceptions. Respect will be shown to this house and this family. And our number-one rule in this house is—"

"Don't be stupid," he and El finished in unison.

"Follow all my rules and we won't have a problem."

"Yes, sir," Mike and Will agreed, nodding.

"Good. Now, go to bed; you've got a lot to learn tomorrow."

Mike headed upstairs and changed into his sleep pants and a white shirt after taking a quick shower. It was the first time he'd been in a place so quiet in his life, and the only thing he could hear was the sound of water cascading in the bathroom and the faint sound of El humming. Once that stopped and she entered her room, it was silent except for the crickets chirping and the ever-so-subtle rattle of the air conditioner. There was also the whirring of the ceiling fan and he ended up just watching the blades spin.

He couldn't sleep.

Out of a need to get his thoughts down, he reached into his backpack and pulled out one of five notebooks he'd brought for the summer. All of them were fresh and unwritten, and this one was going to be a summer journal of sorts. The others could be used for campaigns or for his original stories, but this one would be for getting his thoughts out and clearing his head. He'd decided.

*June 10*

*Today, Will and I arrived in Hawkins and we haven't really seen that much except farmland and the Hopper place. Chief Hopper seems like a nice enough guy, I guess, and I think he might be one of the more...*

*relaxed police officers I've ever met. The farm itself is pretty decently-sized (I have no idea) and there's a golden cat named Eggo. Like the waffle. Will seems like he's going to spend his summer taking in the scenery and working on his art when we're not working on the farm for Hopper. He's out in town most of the day and most of the work is done by a couple of hired guys and his daughter, El.*

*Oh, El.*

*God, she's pretty. I don't think I've ever seen anybody as pretty as her in my life. I like her curls and her big brown eyes and her voice that sounds so clear like a bell. Honestly, I think I might have a crush on her—which is weird because I just met her. And you're not supposed to develop crushes like that. But it's more than how she looks. She's smart, for one thing, and has a bit of an attitude. Not a bad attitude, but more like... she can hold her ground in an argument and keep up when people start poking fun at each other for no apparent reason.*

*I think I might like Hawkins, though, if I let it grow on me. And if I can go out into town sometimes. The farm's kind of boring, to be honest. The first work I did on it was helping El clean up bags of feed that fell over when she tried to put some back on the shelf. Hopefully, there will be less tasks like that and more of the letting animals out variety. Hopper told us Eggo knows her way around the farm and that she might try and get underfoot if she doesn't get enough attention, just like her owner. El ended up swatting him on the arm for that comment.*

*Anyway, I'm just hoping this summer doesn't suck.*

*Here's to hoping.*

*—Mike Wheeler.*

He closed the notebook and set it on the nightstand, his head feeling less cluttered.

It wasn't his fault that he'd been sent away from Chicago for the summer. No, it was Troy's fault. Troy and his little gang of thugs that had caused Mike and Will to basically get arrested and shipped out. But Mike wouldn't tell a soul why he and Will had ended up in a fight with Troy in the first place because he was a good friend and good

friends didn't spill secrets like that. It would be a betrayal of Will's trust and nothing good would ever come of that.

And with that thought, he closed his eyes.

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**I call this vaguely "Dukes of Hazzard" because of the whole 'pair of boys shipped out to a farm town after getting into trouble and getting up to shenanigans' thing.**

**That being said, I'm not going to give you the whole story of why they're being shipped out yet. Nah, I'll save that for later.**

**The rest of the Party is here; they're just not in the story yet.**

**So long and thanks for all the fish!**



## 2. The Party

The first thing that registered in Mike's mind was the sunlight streaming through his window. In Chicago, his window faced a building which blocked the sunlight from entering, so feeling it first thing in the morning was a new and rather pleasant experience. He yawned and stretched, getting up and finding some clothes to wear for the day before heading to the bathroom. When he went downstairs, he discovered El eating Eggos at the table and Will doing the same to a bowl of cereal. Mike chose to make himself some waffles, too, and popped them in the toaster while pouring himself a cup of coffee and proceeding to add creamer and sugar.

"Ew, why are you ruining it?" El asked.

"I'm not ruining it."

"The only proper way to drink coffee is to drink it black." She sipped from her own mug and Mike grimaced.

"Yeah, sorry. I prefer having taste buds, thanks."

"What taste buds?"

Will started laughing and Mike felt his heart leap into his throat as El smirked at him teasingly.

*Is she... flirting with me?! Please please let her be flirting...*

"Terrible taste in coffee aside, what do we have to do?" Mike asked.

"Well, there's feeding the animals and making sure the garden's in top shape... and there's also mucking out stalls and getting eggs from the chicken coop. Everything else is being done by the farm hands. They should be here—"

She was cut off by rapid banging on the front door.

"It's open!" she yelled. "It's always open, morons!"

"Is that any way to treat your employees?" inquired a boy with curly

hair as he entered, followed by a dark-skinned boy and a red-haired girl.

"If anything, you three are my coworkers."

"El, I might just reconsider being your best friend," the redhead laughed. Then her eyes went from Will to Mike. "Who's the fresh meat?"

"This is Will and that's Mike. They're staying with us for the summer." El picked up her plate and put it in the dishwasher. "I've got to tame the curly beast. I'll be back in a minute."

She headed upstairs and the redhead's eyes once again rested on the two newcomers.

"So, welcome to Hawkins, Indiana—the most sleepy little town this side of Indianapolis. I'm Max and these two behind me are Dustin and Stalker."

"*Lucas*," corrected the dark-skinned boy. "Not Stalker. You're the only one who calls me that."

"Aw, you know I love you."

"Anyway, you guys are just here for the summer, so it'll be nice to have an extra hand," Lucas told Mike and Will.

"And between the six of us, we'll get this shit *done*," Dustin added. "And then we can head into town and figure out something to do."

"Aren't you guys, like, hired help?" Mike inquired.

"Well, yeah, but we've known El for years. *I'm* her best friend."

"Bitch, *I'm* the best friend," Max snapped, shoving Dustin.

"Bullshit. I'm the best friend because I've known her longer and we bond over nougat."

"She eats it to make you feel better. Don't kid yourself." Will stuck his bowl in the dishwasher and Max nodded to him. "So, what did you

nerds do to get shipped all the way out here?"

"We got in a fight and our moms hoped spending the summer here would straighten us out," Will replied.

*Not a complete lie.*

"A fight? Damn. Last time I got in a fight, it was when I punched that dickhead James Fielding in the nose for grabbing El's ass in the cafeteria."

"El did more damage than you did; she got him right in the balls," Dustin pointed out. "No kids for him in the future."

"I didn't kick him that hard," El snorted, coming back down the stairs. Her curls had been tamed into a braid over her shoulder. "Just enough to remind him that consent is a seven-letter word that he needs to learn."

"Let's get this over with," Lucas grumbled. Will followed them out the door and Mike wasn't far behind once he finished his breakfast.

Between the six of them, the chore list only took a few hours to complete and by that time, Mike was exhausted. He let himself collapse on the couch when they all went back to the house and could hear Will groaning on another chair.

"Uh, no," Max laughed. "You two are coming with us into town tonight."

"What?" Mike groaned. "No..."

"We're going to a party at Jennifer Hayes's place tonight. You guys can't stay on the farm the entire time you're here; that's stupid and you'll be considered 'cool'."

"No way. Why?"

"Because you're from Chicago. The city. These kids are from a tiny farm town in Indiana. Trust me, you won't be considered more dorky than Dustin."

"Eat shit, Max."

"It might be fun," Will told Mike. "You know, a chance to be the cool kids for once instead of the D&D nerds?"

"Whoa, D&D?" Dustin gasped excitedly before getting a scheming look on his face.

"Yeah, D&D. Mike and I play it all the time in Chicago."

Mike worried that El would think it was lame, but she looked happy.

"You guys *have* to join us for a campaign," she insisted. "A Mage, a Rogue, a Bard, and a Ranger, plus...?"

"Paladin," Mike responded quickly. "And Cleric. I'm a Paladin, Will's a Cleric. You guys all play?"

"We're the nerds," Dustin explained. "It's what we do. Anyway, we're going to a different kind of party tonight and you two are coming with us. After we stop smelling like shit, of course."

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El shifted nervously in the backseat of Lucas's car as he drove them towards Jennifer's. She wasn't nervous about the party, of course, because she and Jennifer were actually good friends when it came down to it. No, she was nervous about Mike going to the party because he was a nice guy and there were a lot of kids their age in Hawkins who would take advantage of that fact. Not to mention he was cute. Really cute. He'd come into the barn the day before like a knight in shining armor and swept her off her feet (figuratively, of course) and he had the quips to keep up with her. The coffee debate had solidified that, even *if* he had no taste. That didn't matter when he smiled and the light hit his face and highlighted every little freckle on his cheeks—

*Whoa, calm down, El.*

The thought of falling for Mike was absurd to her, at least right now. She'd only known him for a day. Plus, he'd leave at the end of the summer and she'd probably never see him again, so pursuing a relationship with him was pointless and stupid. And she wasn't

stupid.

Still, she couldn't stop herself from glancing at him every now and again. He was talking to Will and Dustin, while Max and Lucas were absorbed in conversation. She hoped that nobody noticed how quiet she was being as she gazed out the window.

Finally, they pulled up to Jennifer Hayes's house and discovered the party was already in full swing. The hostess herself emerged and caught sight of El, her face lighting up.

"Ellie! You made it!"

"Of course I did," El laughed. "We've got a couple summer visitors we need to show the not-boring side of Hawkins."

Jenny's eyes landed on Mike and Will, her breath hitching slightly at the latter, and she smiled even more brightly.

"Well, come on inside!"

The Party followed Jenny into... well, the party... where people were cheering as a girl chugged down a beer in the center of it all. El inwardly groaned as she recognized the girl.

*Stacey Kline. Well, tonight's going to be a disaster and end with at least one fight...*

She side-stepped the crowd and found her way over to the refreshments table, where she grabbed some chips and watched as Mike and Will were forced to mingle. Several people were interested in them because they weren't from Hawkins, and the last new kid they'd gotten had been Max in eighth grade. New people were an uncommon occurrence.

"El Hopper."

She looked up to see James Fielding smirking at her.

*Ew.*

"You look beautiful as ever. Drink?" He held out a cup full of alcohol-

spiked punch that likely also had a little something extra to make her... less feisty.

*Okay, how stupid do you think I am?*

"No thank you. Try it on a girl who doesn't know how much of a creep you are."

"Aw, c'mon, Hopper. Don't be like that!"

"Like what?"

"Such a fucking *prude*."

"*Prude*? El Hopper, a *prude*? As if?"

*And the Alpha Bitch's ears have pricked up. Fucking **thank you**, James...*

Stacey stumbled over, drink in her hand as she smiled at El. As if El was Little Red Riding Hood and Stacey the Big Bad Wolf.

"Hello, Stacey."

"I didn't expect to see you here tonight, Eleanor. I thought you'd be at home with Daddy and the animals. And your two boyfriends."

"Well, I should've expected to see you," El fired back. "After all, isn't this the only way you can sustain yourself?"

The other partygoers began to swarm.

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The second Dustin heard Stacey say El's name, he panicked.

*Shit. Shit shit shit shit...*

El and Stacey had been at each other's throats since elementary school, when Stacey had made fun of Dustin for his lack of front teeth and El had slapped her for it. While they tended not to cross paths now that they were in high school, any confrontation between them could get *legendarily* ugly. Like, you-wouldn't-believe-it-wasn't-a-movie ugly. It was consistently the thing most kids in their grade

wanted to see when they went to parties both El and Stacey happened to be attending and sometimes, they'd purposely make those confrontations happen.

"Abort!" he hissed to Lucas. Lucas knit his eyebrows together in confusion. "Find the others. We need to get the fuck out of here."

"Why?"

"Electra."

Lucas's eyes widened and he ran off to find Max. Dustin saw Will and Mike being folded into the crowd that was surrounding El and Stacey and made his way over to try and pull them out.

"At least when *I* have a guy, it's just one. You have your two boyfriends and a girlfriend, too. What kind of sick shit do the four of you do besides play Dungeons & Dragons, anyway?"

"Last time I checked, making out with two guys and sleeping with a third in one night is far *worse* than anything me and my friends get up to." Stacey's nostrils flared. "Besides, isn't your dad running for mayor? He'll be ashamed to see what his *precious daughter* gets up to that could ruin his chances."

"As soon as my dad gets elected, I'm telling him to fire yours so your poor ass can get out of Hawkins for *good*."

"You mean *if* he gets elected. And he won't."

That did it. Stacey launched herself at El and the shorter girl side-stepped her attack. As soon as the head cheerleader of Hawkins High hit the floor, she was springing back up. But to everybody's shock, Mike grabbed El's hand and pulled her out of the way. Even Stacey was surprised enough that Mike was able to drag El out of the crowd. Dustin breathed a sigh of relief.

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"Let me strangle her. Just this once," Max begged as they all headed back to the car.

"Max, we've been over this—if *anybody's* going to strangle Stacey

Kline, it's going to be El," Lucas told his girlfriend. Mike took a deep breath and turned to El.

"What was up with that?"

"You mean Stacey and me? We hate each other with a burning passion. It's like that all the time when we meet face to face." She narrowed her eyes. "I can handle myself, you know."

"I... I just wanted to get you out of there! I didn't—wasn't *trying* to—you weren't going to be able to get out on your own!"

"Calm the word vomit, Michael. I'm teasing. Thanks for pulling me out. I really wouldn't have gotten out of that unscathed."

"I called Electra!" Dustin stated.

"Electra?" Mike raised his eyebrows.

"You've heard of an Oedipus complex, right?" El asked.

"Yeah, where a guy supposedly wants to kill his father and sleep with his mom—gross, by the way. What about it?"

"An Electra complex is the same thing, but flipped. The daughter wants to kill her mom and sleep with her dad. I'm kinda into psychology and it's our code for when things get dicey with Stacey. Call an Electra and it means it's time to get the hell out before my dad gets called. Because *nobody* wants that shit."

"It gets ugly?"

"Very ugly."

Mike swallowed, suddenly grateful that he hadn't gotten in between El and Stacey sooner.

*This is going to be one hell of a summer...*